

Reader

Social Studies

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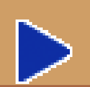


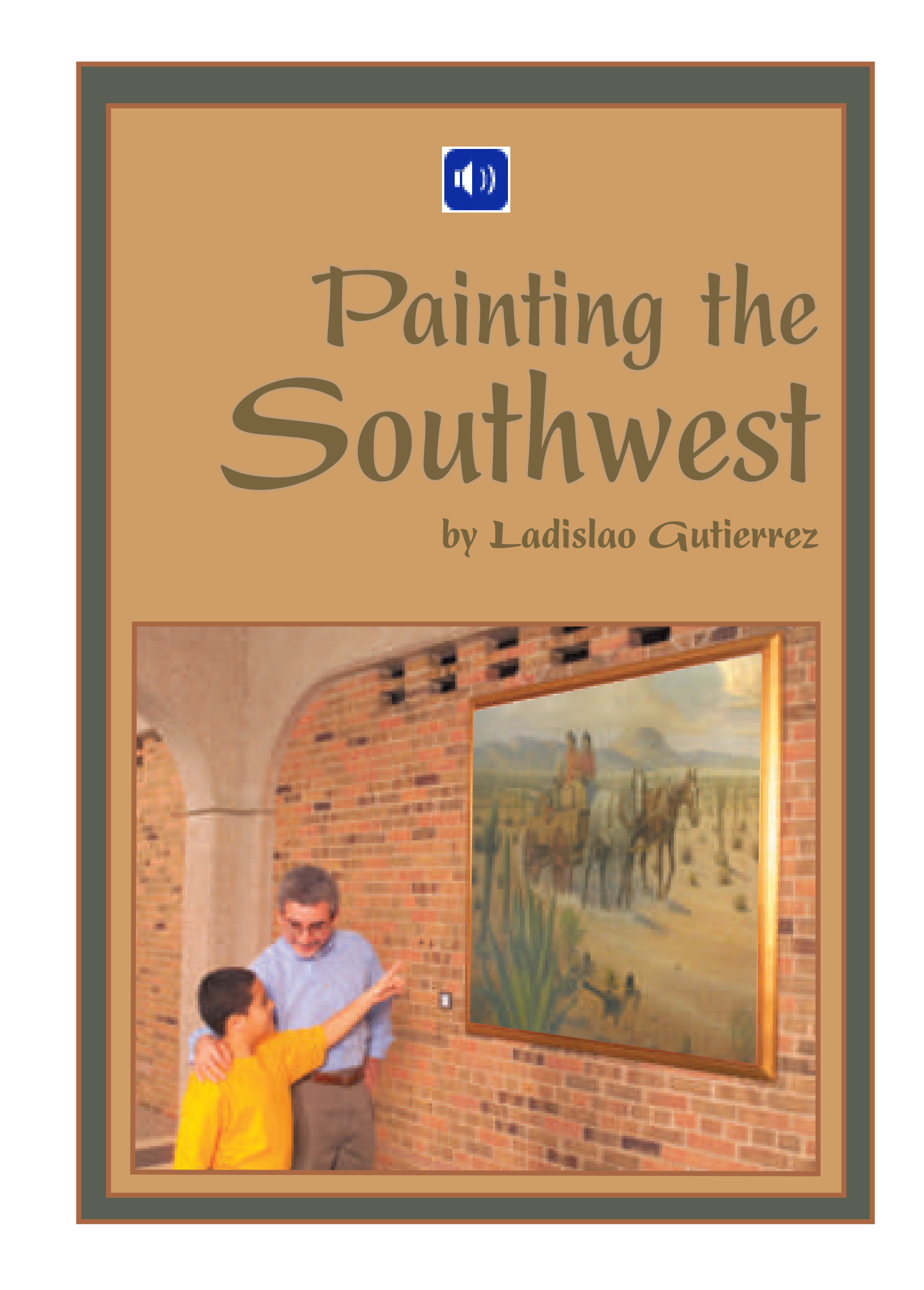
Social Studies

Painting the Southwest

by Ladislao Gutierrez









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Stop, Thief!

My grandfather is an artist. He lives in Skull Valley, Arizona. I visit him from New Jersey every summer. Grandpa takes me to art galleries. An art gallery is a building or a room used to show art, such as paintings and sculptures, which are statues and other carved art. We talk about the paintings. Grandpa tells me about the artists and the materials they use—things like oil paints, pens, pencils, watercolors, and pastels.

Grandpa tells me, "Every artist has something to say. An artist talks to us through paintings and sculptures. Artists share their ideas and feelings in their art."



I want to be an artist when I grow up.

Today, we are looking at watercolors by Norton Williams. Mr. Williams lived in California and the Southwest in the 1900s. For many years, he was a painter for the United States Navy.

When Mr. Williams grew older, he moved to Arizona. He saw cowboys and Native Americans. He saw small pueblos and ranches. He spent time in the desert. He used watercolors and pastels to paint the people and places of the American Southwest.

pueblos: Native American villages of the Southwest



Winter Wood, a painting by Norton Williams of Navaho people and their hogan (house), dog, and burro

"Mr. Williams tells stories in his art," I say.

"Yes," says Grandpa. "He uses watercolors to tell us about life in the Southwest long ago. He tells stories about Native Americans and cowboys, hogans and pueblos, about burros and horses, about pioneers and ranchers."

I look closely at a painting, and I feel confused. "That looks like snow on the ground. I thought the Southwest was all desert."

Grandpa laughs. "It can snow in the desert. A desert is just a place with very little rain. It isn't all sand and cactus. Up in the mountains, there is high desert. You can have tall pine trees in the high desert. You can even have snow up there. There must be trees nearby. These people are gathering wood for fires."



The next painting also confuses me. I ask Grandpa, "What's that behind the woman? It looks like a city."

"Some native people lived in cities. Some didn't." says Grandpa. "There were cities all over the Southwest. Some of the old cities were big. Most of them were small pueblos. Some were built on the tops of cliffs, or into mountainsides."





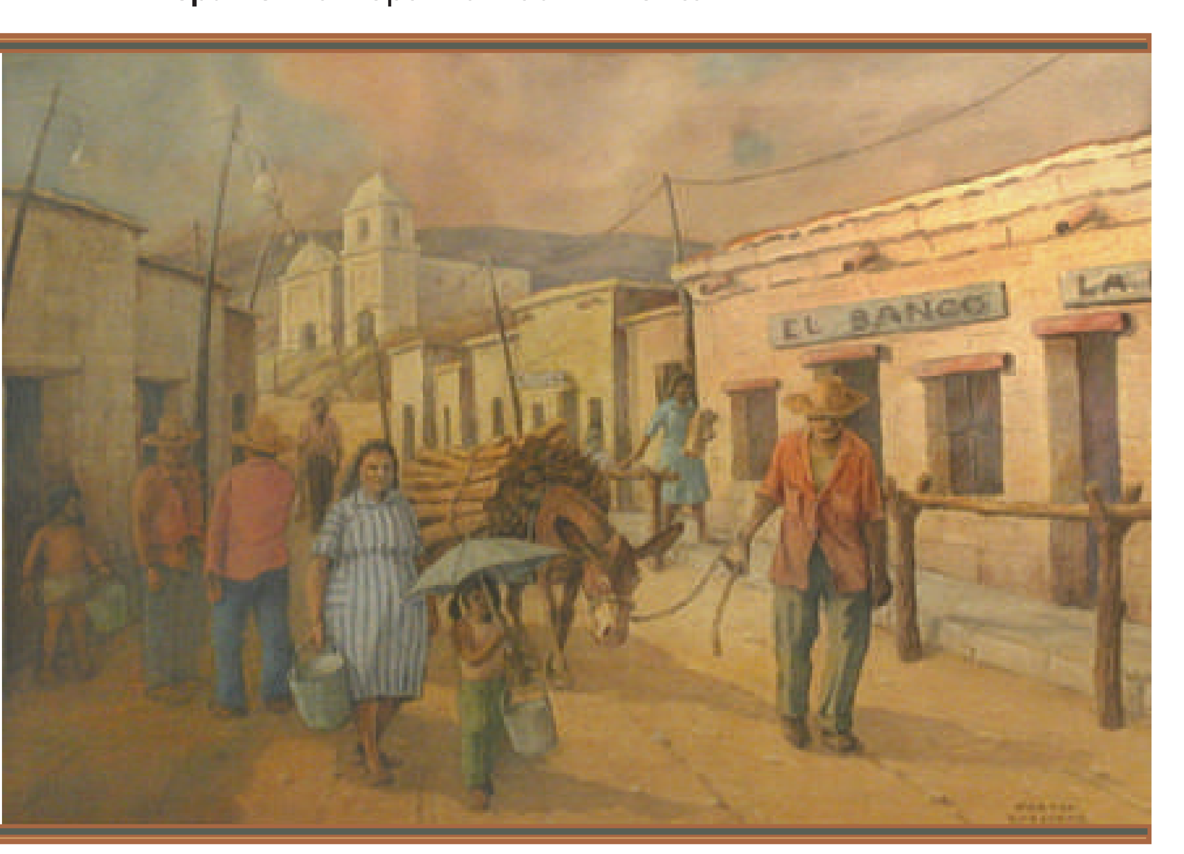
A Stroll with the Twins

Next, we look at a watercolor of an old town. The people in it look Hispanic, like people in my family.

"The next folks to come to the Southwest were Hispanic," says Grandpa. "The Southwest used to be part of Mexico. Now California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and other states are part of the United States. We Mexican Americans still live here."

Grandpa and I like this painting a lot.

Hispanic: from Spain or Latin America




South of the Border

Grandpa explains, "The Mexican people built villages or towns too. Some people lived in town. Others rode in to the towns on horses or in wagons. They didn't go to town very often.

"In those days, people made almost everything they needed at home. They went to town to buy things they couldn't make, such as tools and saddles for their horses. Some people went to church and to the bank in town too."

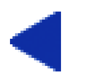


I look closely at the painting. "The woman probably bought her bucket in town," I tell Grandpa. "I bet the girl bought her umbrella there too."

Extend Language Cognates

Sometimes a word in one language sounds or looks like a word in another language. If these words have similiar meanings, they are called *cognates.* Cognates can help you learn a new language. Here are some English-Spanish cognates. Can you name others?

English	Spanish
bank	banco
desert	desierto
mountain	montaña



A painting of cowboys is next. I know all about cowboys. Many came to the Southwest to drive cattle to market. They kept the cattle in big groups or in long lines to go across the land. That was called a "cattle drive."

Cowboys called the land where the cattle grazed, or ate grass, "the range." Sometimes the land was a prairie or plains where grasses grew. Sometimes the land was a desert of sand and cacti and not much grass.

Grandpa points to the chuckwagon in the painting. A cook kept his pots and pans and all his cooking tools in the chuckwagon. When the cowboys stopped for the night, he could cook them a meal. He could cook anywhere.

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market: a place to buy and sell things



Beans and Coffee



Heading in

Cowboys were out on the range a lot. They didn't see many people until they got their cattle to market. I look at another painting. "Those cowboys are in the middle of nowhere!" I say to Grandpa.

"Yes," says Grandpa. "I think cowboys liked to have a lot of land around them. Even now, parts of the Southwest don't have very many people—compared to the Northeast."

Grandpa lives far from other people too. I think many of the people of the Southwest still like having lots of land around them.

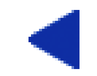
I think about the watercolors as we drive home. The truck shakes as we drive across a dry riverbed. I say, "Things were softer long ago. Weren't they, Grandpa?" Grandpa looks at me with interest. He wants to know what I mean. I explain, "Mr. Williams used soft colors in all his paintings. I think he wanted us to know that times were soft too. They were gentle."

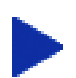


Grandpa smiles. "The people worked hard in those days, just as we do today. Life was hard back then. But I know what you mean. Life was full of chores, but life was not fast. People spent more time at home and in nature."

"That's why Mr. Williams didn't use many bright or very dark colors," I decide. "He showed us a quiet time."

chores: tasks, jobs **in nature:** outdoors









Back at Grandpa's house, I watch him paint. Grandpa is painting a picture of his own house. He uses oil paints. Oil paints are thick. Grandpa paints with bright colors. Grandpa paints a colorful sunset. His colors seem loud and lively to me!

"I liked Mr. Williams's paintings," I say. "But I like the way you paint too!"

"Every artist has a special style," Grandpa says. "I wonder how you will paint one day."

"I do, too," I reply. "I do, too!"





Talk About It

1. Choose a painting in this book. Talk about the details in the painting. What does the painting show about life in the Southwest?
2. How is Grandpa's style of painting different from the style of Mr. Williams?

Write About It

3. What did you learn about the Southwest? Make a chart on a separate paper.

The Land	The Animals	The People
The plains had grass.	Cattle ate grass.	

Extend Language

Use this book and other sources to find more words that describe the desert. Make a web of words about deserts.

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